

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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S E C R E T VIENTIANE 8605

EXDIS

DEPT PASS CINCPAC FOR POLAD AND USSAG

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, LA

SUBJECT: MORALE AND DISCIPLINE IN FAR

REF: VIENTIANE 8487

1. I MET WITH GENERAL BOUNPONE MAKTHEPHARAKS, COMMANDER IN CHIEF, FAR, ON THE AFTERNOON OF NOVEMBER 20 TO REVIEW WITH HIM THE SITUATION WITHIN THE LAO ARMED FORCES.

2. VETERANS DEMONSTRATION. GENERAL BOUNPONE OPENED THE CONVERSATION BY DESCRIBING THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH HAD LED TO THE CANCELLATION OF A LARGE-SCALE DEMONSTRATION BY WAR VETERANS ON NOVEMBER 18TH. HE SAID THAT THE FAR STAFF UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP HAD CONTACTED THE LEADERS OF THE VETERANS MOVEMENT AND HAD POINTED OUT THAT ANY DEMONSTRATION WOULD PLAY INTO THE HANDS OF THE PATHET LAO. HE SAID HE BELIEVED THAT NO FURTHER DEMONSTRATIONS WERE LIKELY TO TAKE PLACE IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. I SAID I WAS PLEASED WITH THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS PROBLEM HAD BEEN RESOLVED BUT THAT THE BASIC PROBLEM OF THE WELFARE OF VETERANS HAD NOT BEEN RESOLVED.

3. DEMOBILIZATION. I POINTED OUT TO BOUNPONE THAT IT APPEARED TO ME THAT FAR WAS LAGGING IN CARRYING OUT ITS PLANNED DEMOBILIZATION AND THAT ARRANGEMENTS

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FOR BONUSES OR OTHER VETERANS BENEFITS WERE FAR FROM

CLEAR. AT VARIOUS MEETINGS WITH DEFENSE MINISTER SISOUK AND SENIOR OFFICERS OF FAR, THIS SUBJECT HAD BEEN EXTENSIVELY DISCUSSED BUT VERY LITTLE HAD ACTUALLY BEEN DONE. THE FAR STAFF ALLUDED TO THE EXISTENCE OF CROWN LANDS WHICH COULD BE MADE AVAIL-ABLE TO VETERANS BUT MY EFFORTS TO DETERMINE WHAT AMERICAN ASSISTANCE MIGHT BE REQUIRED TO INSTALL VETERANS ON THESE LANDS HAVE BEEN UNAVAILING. BOUNPONE REPLIED THAT HE RECOGNIZED THAT MORE STAFF WORK WAS REQUIRED BUT IT WAS VERY HARD FOR HIM TO GET HIS SUBORDINATES TO PAY ATTENTION TO MATTERS OF THIS KIND.

4. SUPPORT. I EXPRESSED TO BOUNPONE AS I HAD TO KOUPRASITH MY VIEW THAT ALTHOUGH U.S. POLICY HAD NOT CHANGED, THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING U.S. ASSISTANCE TO FAR WERE AFFECTED BY PRESENT-DAY POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REALITIES. FOR THIS REASON, GENERAL TREFRY ANFVXLAVE BP SEEKING TO BRING ABOUT VARIOUS ECONOMIES. I THEN DREW ATTENTION TO THE UNHAPPY POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS OF CORRUPTION WITHIN FAR AND OF SUCH EPISODES AS THE SEIZURE IN THAILAND OF WEAPONS WHICH COULD BE TRACED TO FAR ARSENALS. BOUNPONE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THE SITUATION PERFECTLY AND THAT HE WAS DETERMINED TO ESTABLISH FIRM DISCIPLINE WITHIN THE ARMY. HE HAD ALREADY TAKEN SEVERE STEPS TO PUNISH THOSE GUILTY OF TRAFFICKING IN ARMS. I SAID THAT WE HAD NO INFORMATION REGARDING THE PUNISHMENTS WHICH HAD BEEN METED OUT AND I WOULD APPRECIATE HIS LETTING ME KNOW WHAT HAD BEEN DONE SO THAT THE STEPS TAKEN BY FAR COULD BE MADE KNOWN TO WASHINGTON. BOUNPONE AGREED THAT THIS WAS A GOOD IDEA.

5. DISCIPLINE AND MORALE. BOUNPONE STATED THAT ALTHOUGH HE BORE THE TITLE OF COMMANDER IN CHIEF, HE WAS HAMSTRUNG BY THE LIMITATIONS IMPOSED ON HIM BY VARIOUS POLITICIANS AND BY SOME OF HIS SUBORDINATES. GENERAL KOUPRASITH AND GENERAL OUDONE SANANIKONE WERE ALWAYS INTRIGUING TO DEFEND THE INTERESTS OF THEIR SUBORDINATES AND IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO CLEAN HOUSE WHEN SO MANY

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POLITICAL INFLUENCES WERE ZXOUGHT TO BEAR ON TRANSFERS AND RETIREMENTS. FOR EXAMPLE, HIS ATTEMPTS TO REMOVE GENERAL SOUTCHAY FROM MR IV AND REPLACE HIM WITH GENERAL PHASOUK HAD BEEN THWARTED BY KOUPRASITH AND THE PRIME MINISTER. I SUVO THAT I WISHED TO BE CANDID WITH BOUNPONE AND THAT THE ASSIGNMENT OF PHASOUK TO MR IV, WHERE HE AND HIS FAMILY WERE SO WIDELY KNOWN TO BE INVOLVED IN CORRUPT PRACTICES, APPEARED

TO ME TO BE EXTREMELY ILL-ADVISED. IN MY VIEW
PRESSURE WAS MOUNTING WITHIN THE ARMY FOR A SWEEPING
CORRECTION OF PRESENT DAY ABUSES. BOUNPONE REPLIED
THAT HE AGREED BUT COMMENTED THAT LITTLE COULD BE
DONE. HE EXPRESSED CONCERN REGARDING THE ACTIONS
WHICH OFFICERS WHO WERE FORCED INTO RETIREMENT
MIGHT TAKE. IN A PROLONGED DISCUSSION OF THIS TOPIC,
I COULD ONLY MAKE OUT THAT BOUNPONE FEARED VAGUE
"INTRIGUES AND PRESSURES." MY EFFORTS TO PERSUADE
HIM THAT THESE OFFICERS WOULD NOT PRESENT A SERIOUS
THREAT TO THE VIENTIANE SIDE WENT UNHEEDED.

6. COMMENT. IT IS DIFFICULT TO KEEP GENERAL
BOUNPONE FOCUSSED ON A PARTICULAR PROBLEM AND HIS
ABILITY TO DIGRESS AND REMINISCE IS REMARKABLE.
HE OBVIOUSLY UNDERSTANDS THAT SOMETHING IS WRONG
BUT HAS NEITHER THE ABILITY NOR DETERMINATION TO
TAKE THE NECESSARY ACTION. RECOGNIZING THAT THIS
CONTINUES TO BE A QUIXOTIC EXERCISE, I PLAN TO
PURSUE THIS TOPIC FURTHER WITH SISOUK WHEN HE RETURNS.
WHITEHOUSE

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED CINCPAC.

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